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Beach Vitex Invades the Carolina Coast

Beach Vitex (*Vitex rotundifolia*) a deciduous, woody vine from Japan and Korea has been called the “Kudzu” of the beach. It was introduced to the southeastern U.S. in the mid-1980s for use as an ornamental landscape plant and for sand dune stabilization.

“The plant was not maliciously brought to the U.S. to do harm to the coast,” said Dale Suiter, biologist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Raleigh Field Office. “However, we have found that it is highly prolific and over time it will crowd out native plants and threaten our natural sand dune system,” said Suiter. “The Service is concerned because it can impact federally listed threatened and endangered species such as sea beach amaranth, sea turtles and some nesting shore birds,” he said.

The North Carolina Beach Vitex Task Force was established in February 2005 in order to document existing beach vitex locations and control its spread along the coast. The North Carolina Task Force has joined forces with the South Carolina task force which formed in the Fall of 2003. Both task forces are diverse groups with government and state officials teaming up with private individuals along with representatives from the nursery and landscape industry.

Each Task Force is trying to manage and oversee:

- Early detection: Reporting and mapping of beach vitex populations along the coast.
- Prevention: Removal of seedlings from public areas and no further planting of beach vitex.
- Ecological assessment: Should the plant be regulated by state and/or federal regulations and what impact has the plant already had on at risk species.
- Safe Removal: Development of environmentally sound methods for removal of large plantings without further spreading the plant.
- Restoration: Restore the area with native plants once the beach vitex is removed.

“We still have plenty of time to help stop the spread of this plant,” said Suiter. “Research is being conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey and Clemson University to find ways to control and eradicate colonies of this plant,” he said. “The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is developing methods for restoration of sand dunes with native plants once the large plantings have been removed.

What can you do to help:

- Do not plant beach vitex.
- Notify the Beach Vitex Task Force of any populations that you find, including the street address or GPS coordinates.

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- Contact the Beach Vitex Task Force to verify identification and to obtain site specific advice on the removal of mature beach vitex colonies and replacement with native plant species.
- If removal of beach vitex is not a short term option, consider the following:
 - Remove ripe fruits before they are dispersed by birds or water.
 - Trim back branches that may break off and float away.
 - Put all beach vitex clippings in a plastic trash bag so they will go to the landfill, rather than be chipped and spread as mulch.

Points of Contact for the North Carolina Task Force:

David Nash, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service (910) 452-6393,

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South Carolina Point of Contact: Betsy Brabson, SC Beach Vitex Task Force coordinator (843) 546-9531; wbrabson@sccoast.net.

For additional information, visit the Beach Vitex Task Force Web Page: www.beachvitex.org

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